



The President's Daily Brief

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4. Laos

The Communists have overrun the important outpost at Nam Bac. It was the culmination of a ten-month campaign to reoccupy an area they lost in August 1966 after having controlled it for nearly a decade. In another development, a small enemy force struck the airfield at the royal capital of Luang Prabang early today. It was a hit-and-run raid, possibly aimed at preventing movement of reinforcements toward Nam Bac.

These events do not mean that the Communists have launched a bigger offensive. The loss of Nam Bac is more a reflection of poor leadership within the Laotian Army. It may set off a new round of political maneuvering within the military for control of the armed forces.

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FOR THE PRESIDENT'S EYES ONLY

Special Daily Report on North Vietnam



~~Top Secret~~

3.5(c)

16

15 January 1968

~~TOP SECRET~~

3.5(c)

Special Daily Report on North Vietnam
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I. NOTES ON THE SITUATION

Another Trinh Interview: Remarks attributed to North Vietnam's foreign minister in a recent, but undated, interview with a Bulgarian correspondent underscore Hanoi's contention that it has been on record for nearly a year as willing to talk with the US after the bombing is stopped. The interview, carried by the official Bulgarian news agency on 12 January, quotes Trinh as saying that a year ago he had "clearly pointed out that there will be talks" between North Vietnam and the US after a halt in the bombing and other US acts of war. These are not the words he used in his original "could" formulation, but instead are the ones of his less ambiguous statement of 30 December. The interview probably took place after 30 December, but this is not clear.

The wording in the Bulgarian interview suggests that while Hanoi is content to have the change in the Trinh formulation interpreted as an initiative on its part and thus put the onus on the US for the next move, it nevertheless wants to make clear that the substance of its position has not changed.

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Viet Cong Reiterates Tet Cease-fire: In a communiqué charging that allied forces "deliberately distorted" Communist policy on holiday cease-fires and tried to limit their duration, the Viet Cong's news agency on 12 January restated the Communist decision ordering a seven-day "suspension of military attacks" during the Lunar New Year festival beginning 27 January. The communiqué said there had been "consistent violations" of the Christmas and New Year truces, and asserted that the US and its allies took advantage of the periods to conduct "mop-up operations" and to stage air attacks. It warned that violations of the forthcoming Lunar New Year truce would be "appropriately punished."

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Query to North Vietnam: Ambassador Goldberg was informed by Emmet Hughes of Newsweek that on 6 or 7 January Hughes had sent a letter to the North Vietnamese Foreign Ministry asking for clarification of Hanoi's statement about its readiness to talk with the US. The letter contains ten detailed questions asking about the North Vietnamese terms for settlement of the conflict. Hughes said he would inform Ambassador Goldberg if he receives even the slightest response from Hanoi.

It is highly unlikely that the North Vietnamese will respond in any detail to Hughes' questions, although they may, as they have with other recent queries, repeat the foreign minister's formulation about being willing to talk if the bombing and other acts of war are stopped.

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Hanoi Propaganda: North Vietnam's party daily, Nhan Dan, joined Chinese Communist media yesterday in condemning the alleged air attacks on Chinese territory near the Laotian border. The paper said this was a deliberate provocation against China by the US and its "Laotian henchmen," and is part of the US plan of war escalation in Indochina. Other aspects of this "plan," says the paper, include recent bombings of foreign ships in North Vietnam ports, strikes near the Chinese border, threats to invade Cambodia, and stepping up of the war in Laos. Hanoi's Foreign Ministry also issued a statement taking this line.

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Hanoi Claims B-52 Downed: Hanoi on Saturday falsely claimed that a B-52 bomber was downed by North Vietnamese air defense forces on 11 January in the southern portion of the country. Six US B-52s were fired on by surface-to-air missiles on the 11th, but they reported no damage had been inflicted. This is the sixth B-52 Hanoi claims to have shot down; none in fact have been lost to hostile action.

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New French Correspondent: Embassy Paris says that the French Press Agency will be sending a new correspondent to Hanoi later in the month. The man's name is Le Mauff; he is an aeronautics expert, a specialty which might come in handy in North Vietnam. Le Mauff gives the impression of being pro-American. He is clearly anti-Communist.

Le Mauff revealed in talks with the embassy that not all material filed by his agency from Hanoi is self-initiated. Some stories are inspired by the North Vietnamese. In order to distinguish between inspired stories and regular reports, a code has been devised between the Press Agency representative in Hanoi and his home office. Le Mauff did not explain how the code works.

The new correspondent offered to provide follow-up details on his future articles. He suggested that this could be arranged through the French Press Agency's home office.

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Hanoi Again Praises Russell "Tribunal": Hanoi radio reports that a meeting was held in the North Vietnamese capital on 11 January to "welcome" the success of the recent second session of the Russell "war crimes tribunal" in Denmark. The participants at the meeting sent a letter of thanks praising the tribunal for its "comprehensive and deep examination" of US "war crimes," and said the session was of great value in exposing US "aggression." The Vietnamese people, it said, "highly appreciate" the tribunal as "a valuable support and encouragement," and believe it helped "awaken the conscience of the American people and other peoples of the world" against US actions.

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II. NORTH VIETNAMESE REFLECTIONS OF US POLITICAL ATTITUDES ON THE WAR

Hanoi on War Protests in US: In a brief round-up on 13 January, Hanoi radio's international service

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again notes routinely various items connected with antiwar activities in the US. It claims the prosecution of Dr. Spock and others has "aroused strong indignation" in the US. The item notes comedian Dick Gregory's hunger strike protesting the war, and also mentions a Western news report about the four US sailors from the Intrepid who have been granted asylum in Sweden.

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